

The following is an introduction to the environmental analysis of the project-specific and cumulative impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed COSE Update and Consolidation. This introduction describes the general assumptions used in the analysis. The reader is referred to the individual technical sections of the DEIR (Sections 3.1 to 3.11) regarding the specific assumptions and methodologies used in the analysis for that particular technical subject.

The Impact Analysis section of this DEIR (Section 3.01 – 3.11) contains a discussion of the possible environmental effects of the proposed COSE Update and Consolidation for the specific issue areas that were identified as having the potential to experience significant impacts.

“Significant effect” is defined by the State CEQA Guidelines §15382 as “a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance. An economic or social change by itself shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment, but may be considered in determining whether the physical change is significant.”

3.1 BASELINE ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS ASSUMED IN THE DRAFT EIR

Section 15125(a) of the State CEQA Guidelines requires that an EIR include a description of the physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of a project, as they exist at the time the Notice of Preparation (NOP) is published. The CEQA Guidelines also specify that this description of the physical environmental conditions should serve as the baseline physical conditions by which a lead agency determines whether the impacts of a project are considered significant.

Much of the environmental setting conditions of San Luis Obispo County are described in the COSE and the COSE Appendices, incorporated in this EIR by reference. As appropriate, the individual analysis sections of the DEIR (see Sections 3.1 through 3.11) identify COSE chapters where the environmental setting is described. In general, these DEIR sections describe the setting conditions of the county, as they existed when the NOP for the project was released on March 17, 2008. In addition, the DEIR also includes summary of the regulatory setting including any regulations put in place or updated since release of the NOP.

3.2 ORGANIZATION

The individual technical sections of the Draft EIR follow the following format.

EXISTING SETTING

This sub-section provides a reference for the physical setting conditions associated with the technical area of discussion, consistent with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15125. As previously identified above, the environmental setting is based on conditions, as they existed when the NOP for the project was released on March 17, 2008. Each policy chapter of the COSE contains a review of the exiting setting conditions and current setting in the County of San Luis Obispo. The appendices for the COSE provide additional information. Where appropriate, the analysis sections of the EIR incorporates by reference the setting information provided in the COSE as summarized in **Table 3.0-1** below:

3.0 IMPACT ANALYSIS

TABLE 3.0-1
LOCATION OF SETTING INFORMATION WHERE INCORPORATED BY REFERENCE

EIR Section	Setting Information
Aesthetics/Visual Resources	COSE - Chapter 9 Visual Resources COSE - Appendix 9 Visual Resources
Agricultural Resources	COSE - Appendix 8 Soil Resources (Table A8-1 Highly Productive Soils of San Luis Obispo County)
Air Quality	COSE - Chapter 2 Air Quality COSE - Appendix 2 Air Quality Resources
Biological and Natural Resources	COSE - Chapter 3 Biological Resources COSE - Appendix 3 Biological Resources
Cultural Resources	COSE - Chapter 4 Cultural Resources COSE - Appendix 4 Cultural Resources
Geology and Soils	COSE - Chapter 7 Open Space Resources COSE - Appendix 7 Open Space COSE - Chapter 8 Soil Resources COSE - Appendix 8 Soil Resources (Table A8-1 Highly Productive Soils of San Luis Obispo County)
Hydrology and Water Quality	COSE - Chapter 10 Water Resources COSE - Appendix 10 Water Resources
Public Services and Utilities	COSE - Chapter 10 Water Resources COSE - Appendix 10 Water Resources

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

This sub-section consists of the identification of applicable federal, state, regional, and local plans, policies, laws, and regulations that apply to the technical area of discussion.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

The Impacts and Mitigation Measures sub-section identifies direct and indirect environmental effects associated with implementation of the proposed COSE Update and Consolidation. Standards of significance are identified and utilized to determine whether identified environmental effects are considered "significant." Significance thresholds are those criteria adopted by the County or other agencies, which are universally recognized, or are developed specifically for this analysis to determine whether potential effects are significant. Each environmental impact analysis is identified numerically (e.g., Impact 4.2.1 – Division of Established Communities) and is support by substantial evidence included in the discussion.

The next subsection describes each impact of the proposed project, mitigation measures for significant impacts, and the level of significance after mitigation. Each effect under consideration for an issue area is separately listed in bold text, with the discussion of the effect and its significance following. Each bolded impact listing also contains a statement of the significance determination for the environmental impact, as follows:

Class I. Significant and Unavoidable: An impact that cannot be reduced to below the threshold level given reasonably available and feasible mitigation measures. Such an impact requires a Statement of Overriding Considerations to be issued if the project is approved per §15093 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

Class II. Significant but Mitigable: An impact that can be reduced to below the threshold level given reasonably available and feasible mitigation measures. Such an impact requires findings to be made under §15091 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

Class III. Less than Significant: An impact that may be adverse, but does not exceed the threshold levels and does not require mitigation measures. However, mitigation measures that could further lessen the environmental effect may be suggested if readily available and easily achievable.

Class IV. Beneficial: An effect that would reduce existing environmental problems or hazards.

A discussion of effects found to be less than significant is found in Section 3.11 of the DEIR.

CUMULATIVE SETTING, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Section 5.0 (Cumulative Impacts) provides an analysis of the proposed COSE Update and Consolidation's contribution to cumulative impacts to the environment. The analysis focuses on whether the General Plan's contribution is "cumulatively considerable" (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15130). A cumulative impact occurs from the change in the environment that results from the incremental impact of the project when added to other closely related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant projects taking place over a period of time CEQA Guidelines Section 15355(b). Accordingly, the cumulative setting includes related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects in the region.

3.3 INFORMATION UTILIZED IN THIS EIR

This Draft EIR utilizes technical information and analyses from previously prepared EIRs and other documents that are relevant to the consideration of environmental effects of the proposed COSE Update and Consolidation, which is supported by the State CEQA Guidelines (see Sections 15148 and 15150). In addition to materials cited, the Draft EIR makes substantial use of the Conservation and Open Space Element appendices.